

REPORT TO:	July Cabinet 2022
SUBJECT:	Update on the Housing Improvement Plan
LEAD OFFICER:	Susmita Sen, Corporate Director of Housing
CABINET MEMBER:	Councillor Lynne Hale, Cabinet Member for Homes
WARDS:	All

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

The following report provides an update to Cabinet on the proposed strengthening of the Housing Improvement Plan in response to the Housing Improvement Board's March 2022 report and Executive Mayor Perry's mandate to strengthen the Plan.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The implementation and revision of the Housing Improvement Plan will need an upfront investment to ensure we deliver a plan that meets the needs of residents. Financial costs incurred in year will be funded using HRA reserves to ensure this investment delivers the right plan for the community.

The recommendations in this report will require investment beyond March 2023. The HRA business plan and capital programme report will be presented to Cabinet in September 2022 at which point the draft HRA budget for financial year 2023-2024 will be updated to reflect any budgetary changes required.

KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO.:

The Executive Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to...

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- i. Note and agree to the review and strengthening of the Housing Improvement Plan
- ii. Note and agree the proposed next steps to strengthen the Housing Improvement Plan

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Following the coverage of poor housing conditions at Regina Road, the Council's previous administration committed to the creation of the Housing Improvement Board and the development and implementation of the Housing Improvement Plan in May 2021. The Cabinet had agreed that the purpose of the Plan would be to address the failings of the housing service highlighted in the ARK Consultancy Investigation into Conditions at 1-87 Regina Road, South Norwood.
- 1.2 Since July 2021 the housing service has developed and begun to deliver the Housing Improvement Plan. Improvements to the Council's housing service have since remained a concern of the government-appointed Improvement & Assurance Panel and the housing directorate's improvement planning must provide a path to compliance with the Regulator for Social Housing's Home Standard and Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard.
- 1.3 In March 2022, the Council's previous administration agreed the content of the Plan, and delegated authority to further amend the Plan to the Corporate Director for Housing in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Homes (Key Decision: 2022CAB).
- 1.4 In March 2022 Cabinet also required quarterly updates on the implementation of the improvement plan and that going forward it will include commentary from the Housing Improvement Board.
- 1.5 The updated paper and proposals to considerably strengthen the Housing Improvement Plan have been developed utilising feedback from the independent Housing Improvement Board's report in March 2022 and in discussion with the Chair of the Housing Improvement Board.
- 1.6 The Housing Improvement Board's full report on the previous version of the Housing Improvement Plan is available [here](#).

2. REINVIGORATING IMPROVEMENTS TO THE HOUSING SERVICE

- 2.1 Following the election of the Executive Mayor Perry and the Housing Improvement Board's criticism of the Plan in their March 2022 report, the Council's planned improvements to the housing service must be reshaped and reinvigorated to reflect the views of our residents and address comprehensively the root causes of its past service failings.
- 2.2 The independent Housing Improvement Board's report to March 2022 Cabinet stated that the existing version of the Housing Improvement Plan "needs considerable further work if it is to command [the Housing

Improvement Board's] confidence, and, much more important, the council's tenants'". The Housing Improvement Board's report made a number of key recommendations against the following key themes:

- Conditions at Regina Road
- Governance
- Treating tenants with respect
- Improving data and its use
- Staff capability
- Quality of planning

2.3 The Executive Mayor has been elected with the mandate of "strengthen[ing] the Housing Improvement Plan so that it better reflects our determination to get on with improving the service". Subsequently, the Housing Improvement Plan must be strengthened to reflect the call for changes from both the electorate and the Housing Improvement Board.

2.4 To deliver sustained and impactful change we need to ensure we have fully understood and identified the service shortcomings and their root causes. In addition, we will engage more comprehensively with our tenants to ensure their views and concerns are heard both in re-invigorating the plan and in delivering the new service.

3. IMPLEMENTING THE CHANGE IN DIRECTION

3.1 A Housing Improvement Plan which delivers the changes residents wish to see is key to providing assurance to our partners and regaining the trust of our community. Listening to residents will be at the core of the directorate's improvement plans from development to implementation and evaluation.

3.2 The strengthened Plan will have been created through comprehensive engagement with residents to reflect concerns that the existing Plan does not go far enough to create real change for tenants and residents. The engagement will enable the directorate to address the objectives in the recently adopted Residents' Charter and will align with the development of the corporate Customer Access Strategy.

3.3 The strengthened Plan will reflect the Council's ambition to develop the best landlord services in London and this cannot be done without full buy-in from residents, staff, Cabinet and the Housing Improvement Board. It also requires us to fully understand the causes of service underperformance in the past so that we can create sustainable change.

- 3.4 The revised plan will therefore have been updated following a series of deep dives across the directorate to ensure we have identified fully the root causes of service failings and ensure we address them in a meaningful and sustainable way going forward.
- 3.5 The directorate will also be reviewing and strengthening existing project management arrangements to provide strong oversight and ensure outcomes are aligned to priorities.
- 3.6 We recognise that staff have been working hard to deliver the housing service in difficult times. We see the co-creation of a vision and mission as key to supporting staff by setting a clear direction for the directorate. In addition, the culture transformation will also equip, support and engage staff to deliver customer-focused services.
- 3.7 Cultural transformation will be fundamental to ensuring the success of the directorate's improvement plans. As such, the directorate will also be initiating a bespoke culture change plan, aligned with the Council-wide corporate change programme, which will be centred on ensuring residents are treated with empathy and respect. This plan will target the skills, behaviours, attitudes of our staff and contractors to ensure tenants are at the heart of our services. It will also target the Employee Value Proposition aimed at boosting employee engagement and satisfaction, thereby attracting and retaining high quality professionals to the organisation.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 The review of the Housing Improvement Plan will utilise the following approach:
 - Co-creation with residents, staff and Members of a shared vision and mission for the directorate with customers at the heart of how we lead and deliver services
 - Prioritising the importance of treating our customers with respect and empathy throughout all service delivery
 - Deep dives and review of existing service performance, performance measures and standards. Utilisation of benchmarking, Home Standard, Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard and extensive engagement with customers, colleagues and other key partners
 - Learning from best practice provided by industry leaders including the Chartered Institute of Housing, and the Tenants Participation Advisory Service

- High level map of the transformational change required to deliver our vision including structure, operating model, culture, systems, capability, behavioural standards and professionalisation - co-produced with key partners
- Review of existing governance and project management arrangements to deliver impactful change
- Broader evaluation of the interdependencies within the Council which will enable the delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan and other mayoral priorities
- Alignment with the Council-wide transformation plans as outlined in the Mayor's Plan

4.2 We anticipate the above to be completed and inform the Cabinet paper in November.

4.3 Undertaking the actions above will enable the Council to provide our partners with an accurate assessment of the improvements needed with honest timescales. An update on the Plan will be presented to Cabinet in November 2022. Several projects will be kickstarted ahead of the November Cabinet meeting including the...

- Development of a vision and mission for the housing directorate
- Development and implementation of Residents' Charter action plan
- Gap analysis of service performance in alignment with Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard and Homes Standard
- End-to-end review of voids
- End-to-end review of complaints aligned with Housing Ombudsman's Complaints Handling code
- Professionalisation of the workforce to improve employee capability and retention

4.4 The list above is not exhaustive, and all projects within the revised Housing Improvement Plan will align with the Social Housing Regulation Bill by ensuring residents' voices are heard. Further projects will be brought into the scope of the Plan following engagement with residents.

4.5 The reshaping and reinvigoration of the housing directorate is a long-term project which will take place in phases. Timescales will be developed to set the expectation as to what will be achieved at each stage. The transformation of the housing service will be first evidenced by tangible improvements to the areas listed in 4.3. Further detail will become available once the directorate has completed the deep-dives and review of existing service performance outlined in 4.1.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The implementation and revision of the Housing Improvement Plan will need an upfront investment to ensure we deliver a plan that meets the needs of residents. Financial costs incurred in year will be funded using HRA reserves to ensure this investment delivers the right plan for the community.
- 5.2 The recommendations in this report will require investment beyond March 2023. The HRA business plan and capital programme report will be presented to Cabinet in September 2022 at which point the draft HRA budget for financial year 2023-2024 will be updated to reflect any budgetary changes required.
- 5.3 Recruitment difficulties represent a risk to the development and implementation of the Housing Improvement Plan with regards to the recruitment of both operational and change-delivery staff. Whilst HRA funding is available to recruit to the directorate, the combination of a challenging labour market and difficulties attracting staff to the borough represents a risk. The risks to recruitment will be mitigated through the bespoke culture change plan which will include the development of an employee value proposition to attract and retain staff. Attraction and retention of staff will also be increased through the professionalisation of the workforce which will include the provision of training and support to our staff.
- 5.4 Approved by Nish Popat, Interim Head of Corporate Finance

6. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The Head of Litigation and Corporate Law comments on behalf of the Director of Legal Services that the Housing Improvement Plan will assist the Council in complying with the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing. There are statutory requirements on the Council to consult with tenants where they are likely to be substantially affected by changes in housing management practice or policy, and the Council must ensure that it meets these requirements as part of the comprehensive review of the Housing Improvement Plan.
- 6.2 Approved by Sandra Herbert, Head of Litigation & Corporate Law on behalf of the Director of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

- 7.1 There are no immediate human resources impacts arising directly from the recommendations in this report. However, there will be impacts associated with the development and delivery of the Housing Improvement Plan. The Housing Improvement Plan constitutes a key part of the Mayor's Plan, and it

is inevitable that the Plan will have an impact on the Council's workforce. The Council's agreed human resources policies and procedures will be followed.

7.2 To achieve an enduring culture change in the housing service directorate a set of appropriate and carefully designed organisational development initiatives will need to be created and delivered to enable that change, with contextual relevance and sensitivity. The council is currently in the process of delivering the 'Crossing the Threshold' culture change programme, and this should, in part, support and enable the workforce improvements sought in the housing directorate. The importance of the inter-dependency of the culture change programme with the directorate improvement plan is set out more fully in Section 3.7 above.

7.3 Approved by: Dean Shoesmith, *Chief People Officer*

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 The transformation of the housing directorate must champion inclusion through the services it provides to residents, and inclusion of our diverse resident communities will be central to the training and support offered to staff.

8.2 The Council has a statutory duty to comply with the provisions set out in the Equality Act 2010. In summary, the Council must in the exercise of all its functions, "have due regard to" the need to comply with the three aims of the general equality duty. These are to

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it

8.3 Having due regard means to consider the three aims of the Equality Duty as part of the process of decision-making. This means that decision makers must be able to evidence that they have taken into account any impact of the proposals under consideration on people who share the protected characteristics before decisions are taken.

8.4 Regard for the Council's public sector equality duty will be central to the comprehensive engagement plan undertaken to strengthen the Housing Improvement Plan. The creation of a revised Housing Improvement Plan will be accompanied by the development of equalities impact assessments for each workstream which will be developed in conversation with the Equalities Manager. The project managers responsible for the delivery of actions within the workstreams will ensure the EQIAs produced accurately assess the potential impact on vulnerable groups, and groups that share protected characteristics.

- 8.5 Improving data collection from service users across the nine protected characteristics will benefit decision making by ensuring that decisions are based on clear evidence. Departments will also evidence customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction using this method across the protected characteristics to ensure that the Council is delivering a fair and equitable service to all protected groups. Satisfaction surveys should include a question on discrimination to ensure that there is no repetition of allegations of racial discrimination by service users which were considered by the ARK Consultancy report. Though the ARK Consultancy report did not find clear evidence of discrimination, residents perceived that they were treated less favourably because of their race. This occurred with members of the African and African Caribbean community along with other ethnic communities who were identifiable by their non-British sounding names. It is important to note that the definition of a racist incident is one that is perceived so by the victim. Therefore, whether the ARK Consultancy report found clear evidence of discrimination is immaterial to residents' lived experience and the reputation of the Council. There should be an onus on both officers and contractors to ensure that their behaviours to residents is both helpful and respectful and that residents should no longer perceive that they have been discriminated against in relation to their race.
- 8.6 Poor housing conditions and perceptions of unfair treatment are likely to exasperate existing mental health conditions or create new mental health conditions. In particular, when exasperated by other socio-economic impacts such as poverty, unemployment and the cost-of-living crisis. It is important that residents are treated in a fair, respectful and equitable manner to ensure that existing or new conditions are not triggered by behaviour of staff or suppliers. It is important that staff training reflects this.
- 8.7 Residents with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities may be treated more favourably than others in relation to housing improvements. This will not amount to discrimination in relation to the Equality Act 2010.
- 8.8 The Council will also encourage its suppliers to adopt the Council's standards for equality in the borough: Croydon's Equalities Pledge and the George Floyd Race Matters Pledge.
- 8.9 Approved by Denise McCausland, Equalities Manager

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 9.1 The Housing Improvement Programme has no direct environmental impacts. However, through the co-production of services on estates with residents, the Housing Improvement Plan will deliver better services for our housing stock and improved outcomes for the environment. The strategic objectives of the Housing Improvement Plan must align with the actions within the [Croydon Carbon Neutral Action Plan](#) regarding the decarbonisation of social housing.

9.2 Approved by Justin Hunt, Director of Tenancy Services

10. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

10.1 There are no crime prevention and reduction implications as a result of the recommendations in this report. The Housing Improvement Plan itself will increase the safety of residents by improving the relationship between residents and the Council's landlord services in relation to repairs and safety as well as residents' concerns. Improvements to the built environment will likely have a positive impact on crime and disorder, including anti-social behaviour

10.2 When reports of anti-social behaviour are raised by tenants and leaseholders, they will be investigated in line with the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy. The policy details the London Borough of Croydon's approach to anti-social behaviour.

10.3 Approved by Christopher Rowney, Head of the Violence Reduction Network on behalf of Kristian Aspinall

11. DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

11.1 WILL THE SUBJECT OF THE REPORT INVOLVE THE PROCESSING OF 'PERSONAL DATA'?

No, as the report contains no sensitive or personal data

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